INTRODUCTION

by Steve Englehart

Among all his other accomplishments, let's not forget that Jim Starlin co-created the Master of Kung Fu.

Now, it's true that I named Shang Chi, poring over the I Ching until I put together hexagrams meaning "the rising and advancing of a spirit" – and it's true, as many people have pointed out, that the recurrent theme in my work is Rising and Advancing.

But Jim Starlin co-created Shang Chi.

Jim's rise has been so constant that it's achieved an air of inevitability. Ten years ago, he was just another guy off the plane from Detroit, a part of the strangely burgeoning crowd of young writers and artists who were setting up camp in comics. Already in town were Wrightson, Weiss, Wein, Wolfman, (Windsor-) Smith, Chaykin and Bates; soon to come were Milgrom, Gerber, Ploog, Russell, Simonson, Kaluta and more. Times were exciting and you took your shot at whatever moved; Jim started doing layouts for Johnny Romita's SPIDER-MAN. From the word go he showed the two traits that have paced his entire career: solid art and solid-state reliability.

Much has been said of Jim's coming from Detroit. In an interview with Archie Goodwin in the December '81 EPIC, he says that because Detroit was so culturally dead, he and the other Detroit-born comics pros had to create their own culture, and that's undoubtedly true. But another factor the Detroiters seem to share is something roughly equivalent to the Protestant ethic: they all want to work. GM and Ford did not breed a city of dilettantes.

Meanwhile, there was a strip staggering around Marvel in search of some drive: CAPTAIN MARVEL. The Kree captain had started off well under Stan Lee and Roy Thomas, but had lost his way quickly, sinking to what seemed an all-time low with the Great Zo in #11, only to jump back into a classic run by Gil Kane and Roy in #17, only to be cancelled anyway, only to return and be cancelled again, only to return one last time with its *real* all-time low in #22. Gasping, directionless and ugly, Mar-Vell was on everybody's "don't buy" list... so what the hell, they gave it to that new guy in Romita's room. Starling or whatever.

Jim took over the art with #25. He took over co-plotting with #26, and Thanos arrived, also from Detroit. Because Jim *had* created his own culture in the Motor City, and now that he had his chance to show it to a wider audience he could not be stopped.

So issue after issue poured out, each more exciting than the last, and soon he was writing them as well. It made him an overnight sensation, and then he turned his talents to Shang Chi, which only made him bigger. You'd think that this would satisfy him, but no, one day he asked me to take over the scripting on Mar-Vell. I didn't get it; he seemed to love scripting, and his writing, though it still had a few rough edges, was more than a match for most comics. I asked him why he wanted to cut back, and he said, "I've still got a few rough edges. I want to rethink what I'm doing."

Suffice it to say that when he came back with his next strip, WARLOCK, his writing was a match for all comics.

Of course, some of us have kidded Jim about being "Detroit cosmic." Mar-Vell gains cosmic awareness, fights through the entire Thanos War until he faces the grim, gray god himself – and then drops the cosmic cube. But the point is, that sort of nit-picking is only for after the fact, some late Wednesday when you say, "Hey, wait a minute... " While you're inside one of Starlin's worlds (or more likely, universes) you don't question a single thing.

Well, now we're in another of those universes. After WARLOCK, Jim decided to rise and advance his artistic talents by taking up painting, and with the new areas of color and form that became his to command, he devised the largest, most inspiring cosmos yet – that of Vanth Dreadstar. Whereas Mar-Vell and Adam Warlock were singular heroes, Dreadstar is one of a great many heroes on a great many worlds. Not surprisingly, the story till now has been told in a great many places. It began in EPIC MAGAZINE as the Metamorphosis Odyssey, running chapter by chapter from Spring 1980 through December 1981; there we learned how Dreadstar became the sole survivor of the obliterated Milky Way galaxy. Next there was THE PRICE from Eclipse Enterprises, also billed as a part of the Metamorphosis Odyssey, but telling a seemingly unrelated tale of Syzygy Darklock – an unrelated tale until its final pages, in which Darklock met Dreadstar. Now, once more from Marvel comes the third phase of the Odyssey, the graphic novel DREADSTAR. And there will be more. Soon you'll see the first of Marvel's high-tech EPIC COMICS, continuing the quality on a bi-monthly basis.

And the last thing of note is that these graphic albums and space-age comics exist in large part due to the determination of Jim Starlin, who not only saw the future but made sure that it came to pass.

So what we have here, clearly, is "a rising and advancing of a spirit." But now I think I've found an even better tag to hang on Jim Starlin, one that more accurately shows the secret behind everything he does. It was the title for the first CAPTAIN MARVEL that he ever wrote – a title which is still around and still true ten years later.

That title is "Metamorphosis."

Ladies and gentlemen, Jim Starlin...

A MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL

THE METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY:
BOOK THREE

DREADSTAR

by
JIM STARLIN

lettered by
TOM ORZECHOWSKI

edited by
ARCHIE GOODWIN
&
JO DUFFY

editor-in-chief
JIM SHOOTER

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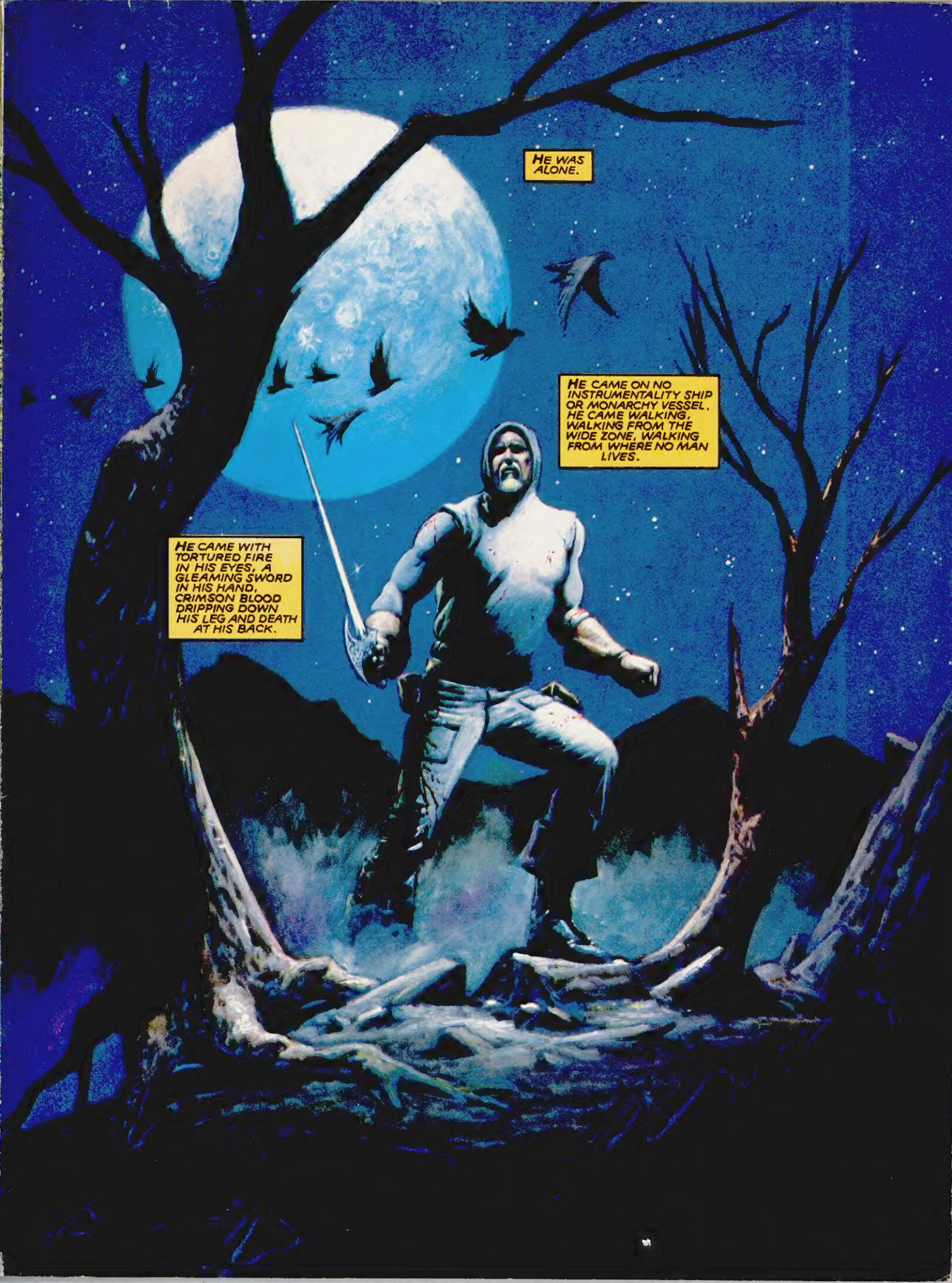
DREADSTAR

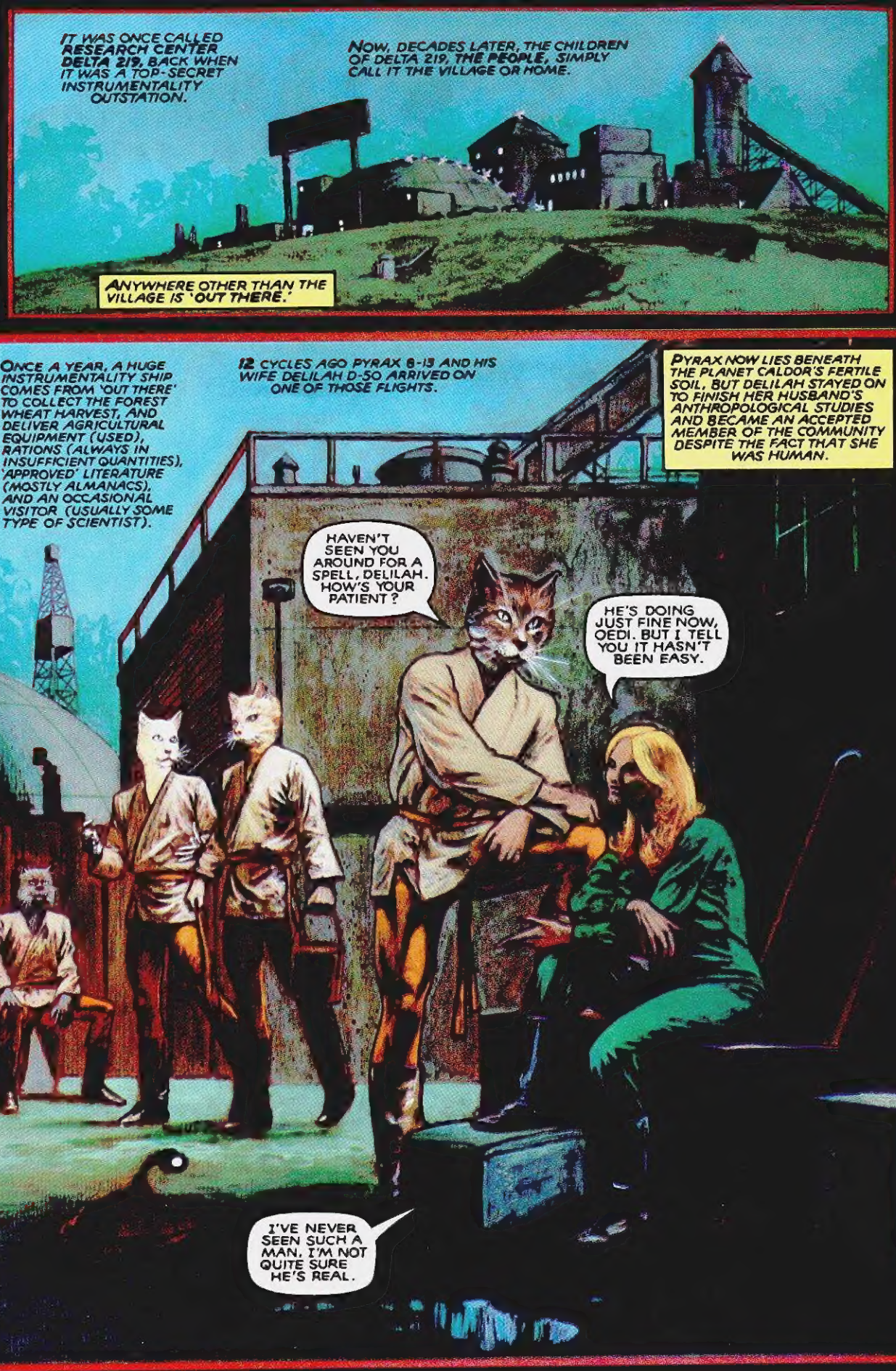
a new adventure in the METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY series

By JIM STARLIN


HE WAS ALONE.
HE CAME ON NO INSTRUMENTALITY SHIP OR MONARCHY VESSEL. HE CAME WALKING, WALKING FROM THE WIDE ZONE, WALKING FROM WHERE NO MAN LIVES.
HE CAME WITH TORTURED FIRE IN HIS EYES, A GLEAMING SWORD IN HIS HAND, CRIMSON BLOOD DRIPPING DOWN HIS LEG AND DEATH AT HIS BACK.

HIS PEOPLE HAD CALLED HIM THE COLD MAN.
HIS FRIENDS HAD CALLED HIM VANTH.
AKNATON HAD CALLED HIM THE PROTECTOR.
THE ZYGOTEANS HAD NO NAME FOR HIM BUT HAD FELT HIS HATE.
BUT THAT WAS LONG AGO AND AS FAR AWAY AS THE DARKNESS BETWEEN THE STARS.
NOW ALL THAT REMAINED WAS HIMSELF, THE SWORD HE HAD CARRIED FOR YEARS...
... AND THE HORROR.
HIS HOPE WAS THAT LEAVING ONE BEHIND WOULD FREE HIM OF THE OTHER.
HE WAS WRONG, OF COURSE.

IT WAS LESS THAN A MILE LATER THAT HIS STRENGTH DESERTED HIM.
HIS WILL FELL VICTIM TO THE FIRE OF HIS PAIN.
THE ROAR OF HIS WOUNDED REALITY DOUSED THE FLAME OF HIS DETERMINATION.
THERE WAS ONLY ONE ESCAPE. HIS BODY GLADLY ACCEPTED IT OVER THE FEEBLE PROTESTATIONS OF HIS SPIRIT.
IT'S A HUMAN... A WARRIOR.
HE'S HURT...
... WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
MAYBE WE SHOULD TAKE HIM TO DELILAH.
SHE'D KNOW WHAT TO DO, HE'S ONE OF HER KIND.


IT WAS ONCE CALLED RESEARCH CENTER DELTA 219, BACK WHEN IT WAS A TOP-SECRET INSTRUMENTALITY OUTSTATION.
NOW, DECADES LATER, THE CHILDREN OF DELTA 219, THE PEOPLE, SIMPLY CALL IT THE VILLAGE OR HOME.
ANYWHERE OTHER THAN THE VILLAGE IS 'OUT THERE.'
ONCE A YEAR, A HUGE INSTRUMENTALITY SHIP COMES FROM 'OUT THERE' TO COLLECT THE FOREST WHEAT HARVEST, AND DELIVER AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT (USED), RATIONS (ALWAYS IN INSUFFICIENT QUANTITIES), 'APPROVED' LITERATURE (MOSTLY ALMANACS), AND AN OCCASIONAL VISITOR (USUALLY SOME TYPE OF SCIENTIST).
12 CYCLES AGO PYRAX 8-13 AND HIS WIFE DELILAH D-50 ARRIVED ON ONE OF THOSE FLIGHTS.
PYRAX NOW LIES BENEATH THE PLANET CALDOR'S FERTILE SOIL, BUT DELILAH STAYED ON TO FINISH HER HUSBAND'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES AND BECAME AN ACCEPTED MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY DESPITE THE FACT THAT SHE WAS HUMAN.
HAVEN'T SEEN YOU AROUND FOR A SPELL, DELILAH. HOW'S YOUR PATIENT?
HE'S DOING JUST FINE NOW, OEDI. BUT I TELL YOU IT HASN'T BEEN EASY.
I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A MAN. I'M NOT QUITE SURE HE'S REAL.

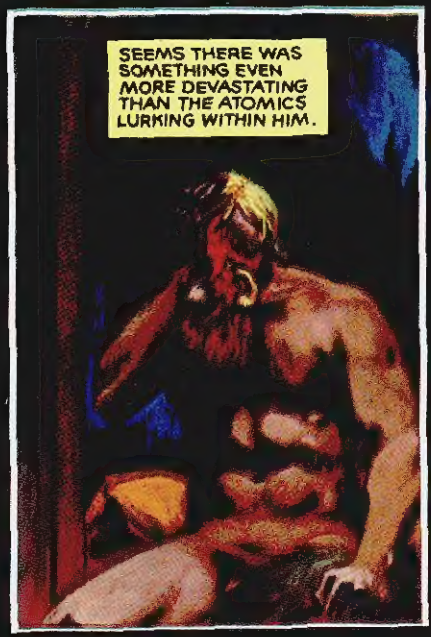
HE'S STILL AS STRANGE AND MYSTERIOUS AS THAT NIGHT YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS CARRIED HIM INTO MY FLAT. BUT THERE HE WAS...

...WITH AN A-SHOT HOLE IN HIS LEG AND ITS ATOMIC POISONS EATING AWAY AT HIS INSIDES.
I'D NEVER HEARD OF ANYONE EVER SURVIVING EVEN A MINOR RADIUM BLAST WOUND SO I FIGURED WE'D BE BURYING HIM COME THE DAWN.

BUT MORNING CAME AND VANTH WAS STILL HANGING IN THERE. THAT'S HIS NAME, BY THE WAY... VANTH.

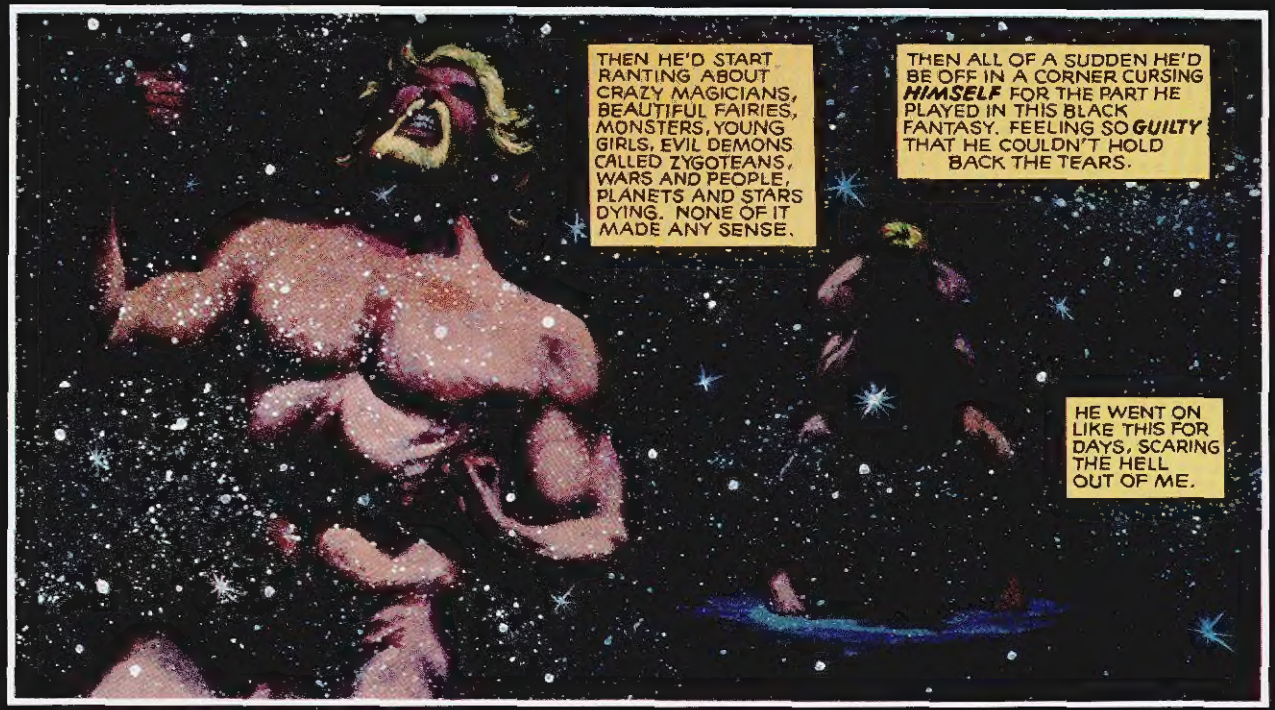
FOR SIX DAYS HIS SYSTEM FOUGHT OFF THE ATOMIC DEATH THAT COURSED THROUGH HIS BODY.
I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT WAS POSSIBLE, I STILL DON'T.

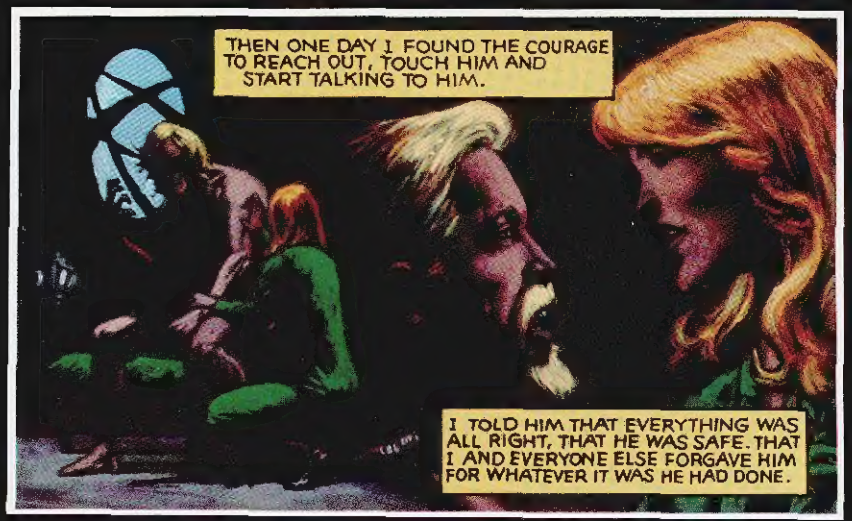
BUT ON THE 7th DAY HIS FEVER BROKE. HE HAD CHEATED DEATH. HOW, I DON'T KNOW, BUT I WAS GLAD. I FIGURED EVERYTHING WOULD BE ALL RIGHT THEN.
I WAS WRONG.

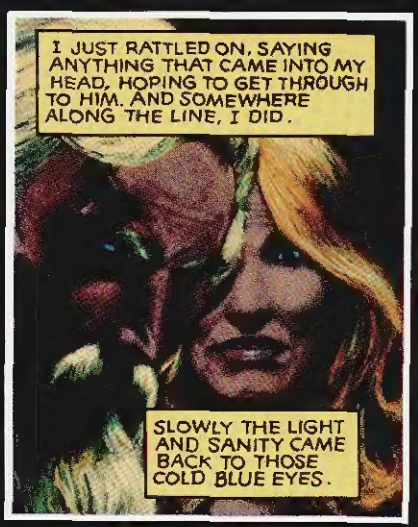

SEEMS THERE WAS SOMETHING EVEN MORE DEVASTATING THAN THE ATOMICS LURKING WITHIN HIM.

SOMETHING THAT LEFT HIM DRAINED AND VACANT-EYED DURING THE DAY, KIND OF LIKE A WALKING DEAD MAN.

BUT ONCE THE STARS CAME OUT HE'D BE AT THE WINDOW, STARING UP AT THE NIGHT... AS IF LOOKING FOR SOMETHING.

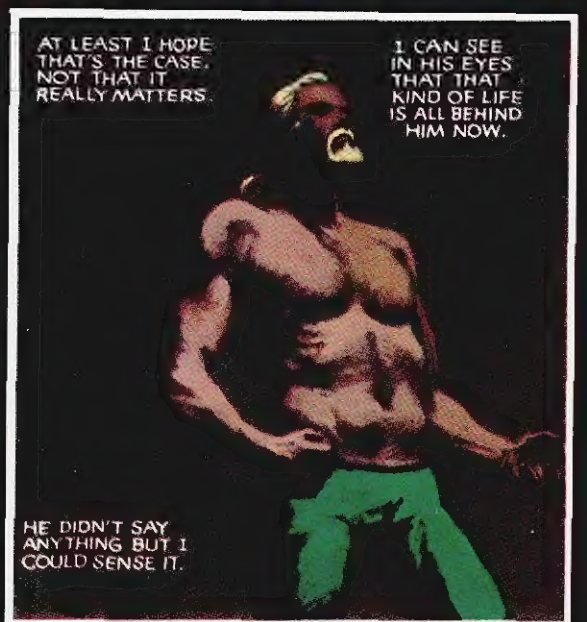

THEN HE'D START RANTING ABOUT CRAZY MAGICIANS, BEAUTIFUL FAIRIES, MONSTERS, YOUNG GIRLS, EVIL DEMONS CALLED ZYGOTEANS, WARS AND PEOPLE, PLANETS AND STARS DYING. NONE OF IT MADE ANY SENSE.
THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN HE'D BE OFF IN A CORNER CURSING *HIMSELF* FOR THE PART HE PLAYED IN THIS BLACK FANTASY. FEELING SO *GUILTY* THAT HE COULDN'T HOLD BACK THE TEARS.
HE WENT ON LIKE THIS FOR DAYS, SCARING THE HELL OUT OF ME.


THEN ONE DAY I FOUND THE COURAGE TO REACH OUT, TOUCH HIM AND START TALKING TO HIM.
I TOLD HIM THAT EVERYTHING WAS ALL RIGHT, THAT HE WAS SAFE. THAT I AND EVERYONE ELSE FORGAVE HIM FOR WHATEVER IT WAS HE HAD DONE.


I JUST RATTLED ON, SAYING ANYTHING THAT CAME INTO MY HEAD, HOPING TO GET THROUGH TO HIM. AND SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, I DID.
SLOWLY THE LIGHT AND SANITY CAME BACK TO THOSE COLD BLUE EYES.

LATER HE TOLD ME A LITTLE ABOUT HIMSELF, HOW HE HAD BEEN SORT OF A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE WHO HAD FOUND HIMSELF IN THE MIDST OF THIS TERRIBLE *WAR*.

MOST OF WHAT HE TOLD ME ABOUT THE *WAR* MADE NO SENSE.
I FIGURE REALITY AND FEVER DREAMS HAD GOTTEN PRETTY MIXED TOGETHER FOR HIM.


AT LEAST I HOPE THAT'S THE CASE. NOT THAT IT REALLY MATTERS.
I CAN SEE IN HIS EYES THAT THAT KIND OF LIFE IS ALL BEHIND HIM NOW.
HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING BUT I COULD SENSE IT.

THE LAST FEW DAYS HE'S BEEN HELPING LADY LECTRA OUT ON HER CROPS.
HE'S QUITE HANDY.
HE CAN REPAIR JUST ABOUT ANYTHING AND SEEMS TO HAVE THE STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE OF TEN MEN.
WHAT ARE HIS PLANS?
I THINK HE'S PLANNING ON DOING JUST WHAT HE'S DOING NOW, HANGING AROUND AND HELPING WHERE HE CAN.
DO YOU THINK THAT'S WISE, WE KNOW SO LITTLE...
YOU MEAN WE KNOW NOTHING ABOUT WHAT KIND OF MAN HE WAS BEFORE HE CAME HERE, THAT'S TRUE.
BUT, YOU KNOW WHAT...?
I DON'T CARE, BECAUSE I'M REALLY BEGINNING TO LIKE THE MAN HE'S BECOMING.
I HOPE YOUR JUDGMENT PROVES SOUND, DELILAH, FOR YOUR SAKE.
SO DO I, OEDI. GOT TO GO NOW.
SEE YOU LATER.
HOW'S THE REPAIRS GOING?
JUST FINE, BUT I THINK IT'S TIME FOR A BREAK.
I'VE SOME QUESTIONS.
I'D LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT THIS INSTRUMENTALITY YOU'VE MENTIONED BEFORE.
YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTALITY?! YOU HONESTLY DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS?
JUST WHERE ARE YOU FROM, VANTH?
A LONG WAY FROM THIS STAR SYSTEM, SO TELL ME ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTALITY, ALL RIGHT?

SURE... WELL, THE MONARCHY RULES THE INNER STAR SYSTEMS FROM GOL TO ADWARTI, WHILE THE OUTER SYSTEMS ARE RUN BY THE INSTRUMENTALITY.

THE MONARCHY USED TO GOVERN EVERYTHING, BUT THE OUTER PLANETS FORMED A BLOC AND REBELLED ABOUT TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO. EVER SINCE, THEY'VE BEEN AT WAR, NEITHER SIDE REALLY WINNING OR LOSING. THEY MAKE A POINT OF MAINTAINING THAT EXACT BALANCE OF POWER.

THE WAR'S GONE ON SO LONG THAT NEITHER SIDE CAN REALLY AFFORD TO END IT. THEY'RE GEARED SO HEAVILY TO A WARTIME ECONOMY THAT IF PEACE EVER DID COME, *BOTH* GOVERNMENTS WOULD PROBABLY *COLLAPSE*.

THEY WANTED TO CROSS-BREED *CATS* AND *HUMANS* TO PRODUCE A *SUPER-WARRIOR* WITH FELINE REFLEXES AND INSTINCTS COUPLED WITH MAN'S INTELLIGENCE AND MANUAL DEXTERITY.

DIDN'T QUITE WORK OUT THOUGH, DID IT?

NO, WHAT THEY ENDED UP WITH WAS A VERY GENTLE HERBIVORE WITH A RARE TALENT FOR BRAINING. THE *PEOPLE*

BUT IT WASN'T A COMPLETE LOSS FOR THE INSTRUMENTALITY. WARS NEED SOLDIERS

SO IT JUST GOES ON WITH NO END IN SIGHT AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS DYING EACH YEAR FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF THE GOVERNMENT ECONOMIES.

THAT'S MADNESS. YOU FIGHT WARS TO *WIN*, NOT TO *BALANCE BUDGETS*.

HOW DOES CALDOR FIT INTO ALL THIS? I SEE NO SIGNS OF WAR HERE.

WELL, CALDOR IS PRETTY FAR OUT FROM ANY REGULAR SPACE CORRIDORS SO THE WAR USUALLY PASSES IT BY UNNOTICED.

THAT'S WHY THE INSTRUMENTALITY SET UP A TOP SECRET RESEARCH PROJECT HERE, BACK IN THE DAYS WHEN THEY WERE TRYING TO WIN.

NOT HERE YOU DON'T.

WHAT ARE *YOU* DOING HERE? YOU DON'T SOUND LIKE A GOVERNMENT OVERSEER.

NO, MY *HUSBAND* AND I CAME TO STUDY THE PEOPLE ON A UNIVERSITY GRANT.

SO THE PEOPLE ARE ALLOWED TO SURVIVE AS LONG AS THEY KEEP PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY FOREST WHEAT AND OTHER CROPS FOR THE GOVERNMENT... AT PRICES SET BY THE GOVERNMENT.

HE WAS KILLED ABOUT SIX CYCLES AGO...

... IT WAS A MONARCHY SCOUT SHIP...

... BUT I'VE STAYED ON HERE, FINISHING PYRAX'S WORK. I'M NEARLY DONE.

WILL YOU BE LEAVING CALDOR, THEN?

I HAD PLANNED TO, BUT... *NO*, I'VE REALLY COME TO LIKE IT HERE LATELY.

IT'S SO PEACEFUL HERE...

YES, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...

IT'S BEEN LONELY FOR ME HERE SINCE PYRAX'S DEATH, EVEN WITH THE PEOPLE HERE FOR COMPANY...
YES... I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...
BUT... I DON'T FEEL THAT WAY NOW... IT'S...
...IT'S ALL CHANGED OF LATE. EVER SINCE... SINCE...
YES... I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN...
SOMETIMES WORDS BECOME CUMBERSOME, AWKWARD. THEY STAND IN THE WAY OF EXPRESSION AND DEFINITION.
SOMETIMES WORDS MUST BE FORSAKEN...
THANK THE GODS THAT THEY SOMETIMES CAN BE FORSAKEN.
BUT LIFE, UNFORTUNATELY, ISN'T ALL SUMMER BREEZES AND WARM EMBRACES IN THE TALL GRASS AND THE SUNSHINE.
THERE YET REMAINS THE NIGHT WITH ITS HIDDEN SECRETS AND MEMORIES.
THINGS THAT DO NOT DIE.
THINGS THAT DISTURB THE SLEEP.
THINGS THAT LINGER IN SHADOW-- HALF-SEEN, WAITING.
WAITING TO SHATTER THEIR WAY BACK INTO YOUR REALITY.
WHAT!?

THE SWORD!
I THOUGHT I HAD SEEN THE LAST OF YOU, OLD FRIEND.
BUT PERHAPS IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. YOU'RE REALLY TOO MUCH A PART OF ME TO LEAVE BEHIND.
WHO KNOWS. I MAY HAVE A NEED FOR YOU AGAIN SOMEDAY.
BESIDES, YOU'RE TOO DANGEROUS TO LEAVE LYING ABOUT.
YOU AND I WILL BOTH REST BETTER KNOWING THAT YOU'RE SAFELY HIDDEN AWAY INSIDE MY SOUL.
THE LIGHT FADES..
Uuuh.. IS ANYTHING WRONG?
NO, LOVE. GO ON BACK TO SLEEP.
I WAS JUST REMEMBERING SOMETHING THAT I THOUGHT I HAD FORGOTTEN.
BUT IT CAME BACK TO ME... IN A DREAM.

... AND SO THE NIGHT FADES INTO A DREAM AND DAYS BECOME WEEKS WHICH TURN INTO MOON CYCLES WHICH FINALLY BECOME A STAR CYCLE.
CALDOR PROVES TO BE A GOOD HOME. THE PEOPLE LEARN TO ACCEPT AND EVEN LIKE THE TALL BROODING BLONDE HUMAN. THE MONARCHY-INSTRUMENTALITY WAR SEEMS TO FORGET ALL ABOUT THE PLANET CALDOR AND VANTH'S WAR BEGINS TO FADE FROM MEMORY.
HE WHO WAS ONCE CALLED THE COLD MAN FINALLY ONE DAY SECTIONS OFF 20 SQUARE CHAINS OF LAND TO START HIS OWN FOREST WHEAT CROP.
THE DESTROYER BECOMES A GROWER AND SMILES.
THE LOVER WHO WAS A LONER ALSO SMILES FOR THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN AT HIS SIDE GENTLY BLINDS HIM TO HIS PAST, SURROUNDS HIM WITH A WARM AND LOVING HERE AND NOW AND DOES HER BEST TO HIDE THE DARK SHADOWS OF THE FUTURE.
...AND HOW VANTH SEEMS MYSTERIOUSLY UNNOTICED BY THE YEARS AND, IN TURN, SEEMS TO NOT NOTICE THEM.
FOR THE STAR CYCLES GROW TO A DECADE, THEN TWO, THEN THREE AND DELILAH IS AWARE OF TIME'S PASSING UPON HER PERSON...
BUT FOR THIRTY STRAIGHT STAR CYCLES THE HARVEST IS GOOD, AND VANTH AND DELILAH KNOW PEACE AND LOVE.
THEN ONE NIGHT THE SKY IS DISTURBED BY THE HARSH LIGHT OF REALITY.

IT WAS CALLED MIST VALLEY BY THE EARLY INSTRUMENTALITY SETTLERS. THE PEOPLE CONSIDER IT PART OF THE 'OUT THERE' BECAUSE ITS CLIFFS AND ROCKY TERRAIN MAKE IT UNFARMABLE, SO FEW EVER VENTURE HERE.
THERE HE IS, JUST LIKE WE SAID.
MINDÉ AND I SAW HIM BLAZE OUT OF THE NIGHT AND FOLLOWED HIS LIGHTS TO HERE.
WHAT DOES HE DO?
DO? HE DOES NOTHING. HE JUST SITS LIKE HE'S WAITING FOR SOMEONE. HE'S BEEN DOING NOTHING FOR THREE DAYS NOW.
HE LOOKS HUMAN, SORT OF, SO WE THOUGHT WE'D SHOW HIM TO YOU, SEE WHAT YOU THINK. HE DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT TO US.
HOW SO?
HIS SCENT IS WRONG AND WHEN HE MOVES HE MAKES SLIGHT METALLIC SOUNDS.
WELL, I CAN'T MAKE OUT MUCH FROM HERE, SO I GUESS THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HE'S UP TO.
YOU TWO STAY HERE OUT OF SIGHT. I'LL HANDLE THIS.
BE CAREFUL, VANTH, IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO YOU DELILAH WILL SKIN US ALIVE.

GREETINGS, STRANGER. I AM CALLED VANTH, FRIEND TO THE PEOPLE, WHOSE PLANET THIS IS
YOU ARE ALSO KNOWN AS 'THE COLD MAN' AND IN CERTAIN MYSTIC CIRCLES UNKNOWN TO YOU THEY REFER TO YOU AS DREAD-STAR THE STARSLAYER.
THEN YOU KNOW ME?!
I'VE LABORED LONG AND SACRIFICED MUCH FOR THIS MEETING. I AM CALLED SYZYGY DARKLOCK.
YOU MAY NOT KNOW IT, VANTH, BUT YOU ARE A VERY UNUSUAL BEING.
THE SPIRITS OF LIFE, DEATH AND WHAT STANDS BETWEEN THEM HAVE A SPECIAL INTEREST IN YOU.
AYE.
DEMONS AND DARKFORCES HAVE WHISPERED TO ME OF YOU
I HAVE BEEN SENT TO AID AND INSTRUCT YOU.
BUT I'VE NO NEED
YOU'VE NO SAY IN THE MATTER YOU CANNOT DENY THEIR WISHES OR MY SACRIFICES.
I AM TO BE YOUR COMRADE AND MENTOR. ACCEPT THAT AND ALL WILL BE FINE

BUT WE'LL TALK MORE OF THIS LATER. IN THE MEANTIME I WOULD SUGGEST YOU RETURN TO YOUR FRIENDS TO ASSURE THEM OF MY PEACEFUL INTENTIONS.
I'VE NO LOVE FOR CATS, BUT IF THEY LEAVE ME IN PEACE THEY'LL HAVE NO REASON TO FEAR ME.
THEY HAD BETTER NOT, FOR I CONSIDER THE PEOPLE MY FRIENDS... AND I KNOW HOW TO PROTECT MY FRIENDS.
YES I KNOW, SO REST ASSURED...
THAT I HAVE NO DESIRE TO PIT MY POWERS AGAINST THE MIGHT OF YOUR SWORD.
MY SWORD ??
YOU KNOW ?
MY KNOWLEDGE IS VAST .. AND YOURS FOR THE ASKING, VANTH.
I WILL EXPECT YOU AROUND NIGHTFALL TOMORROW?
YES SURE TOMORROW
VANTH, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
YES, THERE WAS NO TROUBLE
WHO IS HE?
HIS NAME IS SYZYGY DARKLOCK AND HE'S NO THREAT TO YOUR PEOPLE AS LONG AS YOU LEAVE HIM ALONE.
BUT WHAT DOES HE WANT HERE?
WHAT DOES HE WANT?
WELL, MINDÉ, I THINK... IN HIS OWN STRANGE WAY, HE WANTS .. A FRIEND.

ONCE AGAIN THE STAR CYCLES PASS IN PEACE AND HARMONY, AND ALL THAT WAS SAID THAT NIGHT IN THE VALLEY HAS COME TO BE.
LIFE FOR DELILAH AND VANTH GOES ON AS IT ALWAYS HAS EXCEPT THAT NOW TWICE EVERY MOON CYCLE HE VISITS THE GIANT OF MIST VALLEY LATE INTO THE NIGHT. THERE THEY DRINK AND TALK
OVER THE YEARS A PUPIL/TEACHER FRIENDSHIP HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE TWO MEN. VANTH'S OWN NATURAL CURIOSITY FINALLY BURIED HIS STAUNCH STAND TO STAY BLISSFULLY IGNORANT OF THE SECRETS AND KNOWLEDGE SYZYGY OFFERED.
FOR VANTH, THE PASSING YEARS STILL REMAIN AN INTELLECTUAL CONCEPT EVEN THOUGH HIS KNOWLEDGE GROWS IN THEIR WAKE.
SO YOU'RE OFF ON ANOTHER WILD NIGHT WITH YOUR OVERGROWN HERMIT FRIEND?
I GUESS I CAN EXPECT YOU IN AROUND DAWN, SMELLING OF WINE.
I'M AFRAID SO. I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHY YOU PUT UP WITH IT.
COULD BE BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY MALE WITHIN A COUPLE OF LIGHT YEARS OF HERE WHO DOESN'T SHARPEN HIS CLAWS ON THE FURNITURE OR NEED A REGULAR LUBE JOB AND TUNE UP.
YEAH, I SUPPOSE I DO HAVE MY GOOD POINTS, DON'T I?
YOU KNOW, I JUST CAN'T FIGURE WHAT YOU AND OLD SYZYGY FIND TO TALK ABOUT ALL NIGHT.
YOU'D BE SURPRISED AT WHAT A STOREHOUSE OF INFORMATION SYZYGY IS.
HE'S SHOWN ME THINGS I'D NEVER EVEN SUSPECT EXISTED... ADVANCED PHOTONIC SCIENCES YEARS BEYOND ANY I'VE SEEN, NEW FORMS OF SELF-DEFENSE... THOSE MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS I ADDED TO THIS YEAR'S WHEAT CROP... THEY DOUBLED OUR HARVEST...
...THAT CAME FROM SYZYGY.
HELL, WE'VE EVEN DABBLED INTO SOME LOW LEVEL MAGIC TOGETHER
MAGIC? I'M NOT SO SURE I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT.

Aw DON'T WORRY. I'M NOT GOING TO RUN OFF WITH ANY SHE-DEMON OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT
YOU'RE STILL MY ONE AND ONLY...
OH, BE OFF WITH YOU... YOU BEAST!
SEE YOU IN THE MORNING, BABE.
SURE, ENJOY YOURSELF, LOVE
THE WALK TO THE VALLEY IS NO SHORT ONE. THE MOON IS HIGH BY THE TIME VANTH REACHES SYZYGY'S ADOBE HUT
AS HE NEARS HE BEGINS TO STEEL HIMSELF.
SYZYGY HAS EXPLAINED TO HIM THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL OVERLAP CONSTRUCTION OF HIS HOME, BUT IT DOESN'T HELP. EVERY TIME HE COMES HERE HE NEARLY LOSES HIS DINNER.
IT'S A LITTLE EASIER LEAVING AFTER THE SENSES HAVE BEEN DULLED A BIT BY GOOD WINE AND LATE HOURS.
COMING THROUGH!
ENTER AND BE WELCOMED, OLD FRIEND.

I'VE BROUGHT A SPECIAL TREAT FOR US TONIGHT
ODE! HAS DEVELOPED A NEW GRAIN-GRAPE WINE FOR EXPORT. HE'S GIVEN US A BOTTLE TO SAMPLE
HOW APPROPRIATE.
FOR THIS EVENING IS TO BE A SPECIAL NIGHT
TONIGHT WE ARE NOT GOING TO TALK OF THE PAST OR PRESENT AS IS OUR HABIT
TONIGHT WE TALK OF THINGS TO COME.
WE'VE BEEN GETTING TOGETHER LIKE THIS FOR YEARS NOW, VANTH. DURING THAT TIME I'VE TAUGHT YOU EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT THE EMPIRICAL GALAXY, WHICH IS NO SMALL AMOUNT
BUT ALL THINGS ARE FINITE, AND SO I'VE COME TO A POINT WHERE I'VE NOTHING MORE THAT I CAN SHARE WITH YOU
THEN SIT DOWN AND HAVE A DRINK
THANK YOU .. BUT SERIOUSLY,.. I'VE TAUGHT YOU THE SECRET FIGHTING SKILLS OF THE WARRIOR PRIESTS OF SOL, SHOWN YOU HOW THE INSTRUMENTALITY SCIENTISTS HAVE BROKEN THE LIGHT BARRIER WITH THEIR PHOTRON DRIVE SHIPS AND EXPOSED YOU TO AS MUCH MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE AS YOU CAN HANDLE OR EVER NEED.
UNFORTUNATELY, YOU HAVE THE SOUL OF A WARRIOR, NOT A WIZARD... BUT I'LL ALWAYS BE BY YOUR SIDE, SO IT SHOULDN'T MATTER
BUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING ELSE IS THE KNOWLEDGE I'VE GIVEN YOU OF THE SECRET WORKINGS OF BOTH THE INSTRUMENTALITY AND THE MONARCHY.
ALL THIS COMBINED WITH THE POWER OF YOUR SWORD...
MAKES YOU THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN THE UNIVERSE
SYZYGY, YOU'RE TREADING ON DANGEROUS GROUND
YOU KNOW I'VE ONLY LISTENED TO YOUR STORIES AND "LESSONS" BECAUSE I LIKE YOU AND FELT THAT IT WOULDN'T HURT TO KNOW EVERY THING I COULD ABOUT MY NEW HOME... THIS GALAXY.
BUT IN DOING SO I CAME TO REALIZE THE ONLY PART OF THE EMPIRICAL GALAXY I WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH IS THIS PLANET, CALDOR.
I LIKE MY LIFE HERE IT'S SIMPLE, QUIET, PEACEFUL. I'VE NO INTENTION OF EVER LEAVING HERE.

VANTH, I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU, WHO HAVE SEEN THE ALL-POWERFUL FORCES OF THE INFINITE AT WORK FIRSTHAND, THINK FOR A SECOND THAT YOUR INTENTIONS MEAN ANYTHING TO THE WORKINGS OF FATE.
SURELY BY NOW YOU MUST REALIZE THAT WE ARE ALL NOTHING MORE THAN PUPPETS IN A PLAY WRITTEN EONS AGO. OUR LINES ARE WRITTEN IN THE STARS.
NO! I REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT!
I'VE CHOSEN MY OWN LIFE! I'M A FARMER NOW, AND NOTHING CAN CHANGE THAT!
I WARN YOU THAT ANY-ONE WHO TRIES WILL FACE THE POWER OF MY SWORD
YES, YOUR SWORD
DO YOU REALLY THINK THE POWERS THAT ARE PLACED THAT SWORD IN YOUR CARE JUST SO YOU COULD PLOW FIELDS WITH IT?
I THINK NOT.
...NOR WILL YOU, IF YOU LOOK BACK.
LOOK BACK TO HOW IT ALL BEGAN
REMEMBER HOW AS A YOUTH, YOU WATCHED YOUR PARENTS DIE, DEVOURED BY SNOW BEASTS. REMEMBER THE HORROR AND THE HELPLESSNESS
THE MONSTERS GLUTTED THEM-SELVES ON YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER AND SO YOU WERE SPARED. BUT A WORSE FATE APPARENTLY AWAITED YOU.
YOUR HOMEWORLD OF BYFREXIA WAS A HARSH AND FRIGID WORLD WHERE ONLY THE STRONGEST SURVIVED.
A LONE TEENAGER, STRANDED, MILES FROM ANY SETTLE-MENT, WOULD SURELY DIE OF EXPOSURE AND STARVATION IN RECORD TIME
THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN, THOUGH, FOR THE FATES DIRECTED YOU TO THE SWORD POWER, THE CREATION OF THE NOW DEAD LORD AKNATON, OF ORSIROS
THE WONDEROUS WEAPON WARMED AND NURTURED YOUR YOUNG BODY. IT PRO TECTED YOU AND ALLOWED YOU TO GROW TO MANHOOD IN AN ENVIRONMENT NONE WERE EVER MEANT TO SURVIVE IN FOR LONG
YOU GREW, AND YOU GREW STRONG.
YOU BECAME A FORCE
FOR THE SWORD GAVE YOU THE PHYSICAL STRENGTH OF TEN OR TWENTY MEN OF YOUR OWN KIND

THE SWORD ALSO GAVE YOU THE POWER TO ABSORB ENERGIES DIRECTED AGAINST YOU AND TURN THEM TO WHATEVER PURPOSE YOU CHOSE
THE SWORD CAN ALSO DO THIS FOR YOU BY SIMPLY TAPPING INTO THE LIGHT OF ANY SUN OR STAR.
BUT WHAT I FIND THE MOST AMAZING ASPECT OF YOUR WEAPON IS ITS ABILITY TO STORE ITSELF WITHIN YOUR VERY BEING UNTIL NEEDED. THEN ALL YOU NEED DO IS WISH FOR IT..
..AND IT IS THERE.
I SUSPECT THE SWORD IS ALSO WHAT GIVES YOU YOUR GIFT OF TONGUES, YOUR ABILITY TO IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTAND AND SPEAK ANY LANGUAGE YOU HAPPEN UPON.
...AND YOU SIT THERE AND TELL ME YOU'RE GOING TO BE A FARMER
NO!
IT CANNOT BE! THE POWERS WILL NOT ALLOW IT. YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO DO GREAT DEEDS.
YOU ARE ONE OF THE MAIN PLAYERS IN A GAME OF DESTINY'S DESIGN.
I DON'T PLAY GAMES.
THIS GAME YOU MUST PLAY. NO ONE ELSE CAN TAKE YOUR PLACE
BECAUSE THIS GAME IS NOT ONE WHICH WILL RUN ITS COURSE IN A MATTER OF HOURS OR DAYS OR MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS.
THIS GAME WILL SPAN DECADES, MAYBE EVEN CENTURIES, BEFORE IT'S FINISHED.
THAT IS WHY THE SWORD ALSO GRANTS YOU THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY!
IMMORTALITY?! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE KIDDING..
...OR HAVEN'T YOU EVER NOTICED THAT WHEN I'M CUT I BLEED?
MOREOVER, WE'VE BOTH SEEN HOW THE YEARS HAVE TOUCHED ALL ON THIS PLANET SAVE YOU.
YOU MUST BE IN YOUR SEVENTIES BY NOW, AREN'T YOU?
YES, BUT I'VE ALSO SEEN HOW QUICKLY YOU HEAL.
YET LOOK AT YOURSELF. YOU ONLY APPEAR TO BE ABOUT 30.

WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE THIS TO? GOOD FOOD, HARD WORK AND FRESH AIR?
SYZYGY, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE.
I'M AFRAID YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO. FOR YOU'RE A BEING WITH A VERY SPECIAL DESTINY, A DESTINY WHICH CANNOT BE DENIED.
THE HEAVENS CRY OUT FOR YOU! BILLIONS OF SOULS NEED YOUR HELP! HOW LONG CAN YOU TURN YOUR BACK ON THEM AND CONTINUE THIS FARCE OF.. VANTH, TILLER OF THE SOIL?!
IT'S ALMOST OVER, VANTH. IF YOU'RE LUCKY YOU MAY HAVE ANOTHER TEN OR FIFTEEN YEARS WITH DELILAH BEFORE THE THIEF OF OLD AGE STEALS HER FROM YOU FOREVER.
WHAT THEN? HOW WILL YOU CONTINUE TO DENY YOUR NATURE THEN?
DAMN YOU, SYZYGY! THIS IS MY LIFE!
I CAN'T GO BACK TO WHAT I WAS!
I'M SORRY, VANTH I'M NOT TRYING TO BE CRUEL.
I'VE PREPARED YOU MENTALLY FOR WHAT IS TO BE. ALL I'M TRYING TO DO NOW IS GIVE YOU SOME EMOTIONAL WARNING AND AID.
YOUR LIFE OF PEACEFUL BLISS IS ABOUT TO END. YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THAT, OR YOU'LL BE OF NO USE TO THE UNIVERSE
..OR TO YOURSELF.
IN FACT, FOR WEEKS NOW I'VE SENSED SOME DRASTIC CHANGE APPROACHING.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!
I'M NOT SURE...
I'M NOT SOME FANTASY LITERATURE CHARACTER WHO GAZES INTO A GLASS BALL AND SEES A CRYSTAL CLEAR VIEW OF THE FUTURE.
BUT I DO HAVE A SENSE OF THE TOMORROW, AND WHAT I FEEL IS...
..CHANGE AND DEATH.

BUT I CAN AID YOU IN WEATHERING THIS CHANGE, VANTH. I CAN HELP GUIDE YOU THROUGH WHAT LIES AHEAD.
YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO HANDLE THE FUTURE ALONE. YOU'LL NEED MY MYSTICAL POWERS TO AUGMENT YOUR OWN MIGHT.
IN OTHER WORDS, YOU WANT TO TEAM UP SO WE CAN CHANGE THE GALAXY.
YOU KNOW, I ONCE "TEAMED UP" WITH A SORCERER NAMED AKNATON. WITH HIS 'HELP' I DESTROYED A GALAXY AND MURDERED ZILLIONS OF PEOPLE
I STILL HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED TOGETHER.
BUT THIS TIME WILL BE DIFFERENT, TOGETHER WE CAN ARRG!
NO!
DAMN YOUR STARS! THERE'S NOT GOING TO BE ANY 'THIS TIME!'
CAN'T YOU SEE THAT I KNOW WHO AND WHAT I AM?! I'M WALKING DEATH! I'M UNSTOPPABLE POWER, AND I HATE IT!
I'M SICK OF KILLING AND DESTRUCTION AND THE GUILT IT CURSES ME WITH.
ONLY HERE ON THIS PRIMITIVE, PEACEFUL PLANET CAN I BURY THE FIRE THAT BURNS WITHIN ME AND IGNORE THE BLOOD ON MY HANDS, BLOOD THAT WILL NEVER WASH OFF

I'VE FOUND MY PEACE AND HAPPINESS HERE ON CALDOR.
. AND I'LL KILL AGAIN BEFORE I'LL LET ANYONE TAKE IT FROM ME.
VANTH, WAIT! PLEASE LET ME--
I WARNED YOU
...LEAVE ME ALONE!
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU'D BE NO DIFFERENT THAN AKNATON.
ALL YOU WIZARDS ARE A SCHEMING, TREACHEROUS LOT!
STAY AWAY FROM ME, SYZYGY, OR NEXT TIME...
...I'LL USE THE SWORD ON YOU.
BUT BY THE STARS I SWEAR VANTH DREADSTAR WILL NEVER BE A SORCERER'S TOOL EVER AGAIN
NO PLEASE

VANTH! PLEASE. WAIT!
BY THE TWELVE GODS... NO, IT CAN'T BE.
YOU CAN'T LEAVE THINKING THAT. I... NO! WE MUST TALK!
VANTH?
THE VILLAGE
THOSE ARE MONARCHY SHIPS
SYZYGY, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
I SWEAR, VANTH, I DON'T KNOW FOR SURE.. I ONLY HAD A FEELING..
YOU BETTER GET HOME.
I'M TAKING YOUR FLYER. YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE IT TO THE VILLAGE ON YOUR OWN.
I'LL NOT HAVE YOUR EXTRA WEIGHT SLOWING ME DOWN.

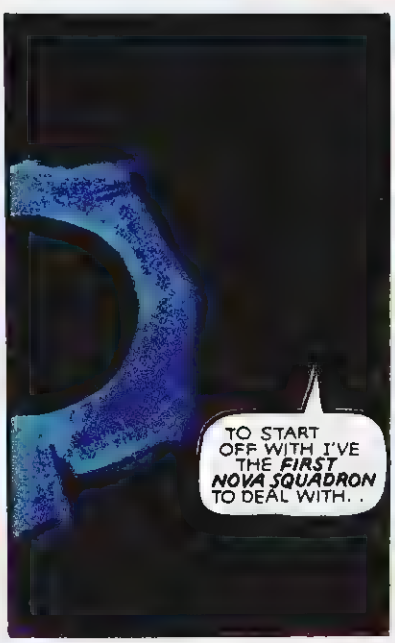
WITHIN MINUTES.
DEAD
ALL SLAUGHTERED

NO
NO!
NO!
NO!
OOOOHHH!
A NOISE. A HUMAN NOISE

SUDDENLY THAT WHICH HAS BEEN BURIED FOR DECADES SPRINGS TO LIFE
... AND FINDS A DOWNED FLYER OVERLOOKED IN THE BATTLE AND LEFT BEHIND.
WHO ARE YOU? WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
DEATH STALKS FORWARD.
SPEAK OR YOU WILL DIE HORRIBLY!
SURE.. SURE... ANYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW
I'M LT. SANDORZ OF THE FIRST NOVA SQUADRON, HIS MAJESTY'S IMPERIAL NAVY.
WHY DID YOU DO THIS?
THE MONARCHY'S INTELLIGENCE FORCES GOT WORD ON THESE CAT WARRIORS ABOUT A MONTH AGO
FIGURED WE'D BETTER WASTE THEM BEFORE THEY WERE PUT INTO ACTION
BUT FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN HERE TODAY WE DIDN'T HAVE ALL THAT MUCH TO WORRY ABOUT WITH THESE CATS
WE WERE ALSO ORDERED TO TERMINATE ANY SCIENTISTS WE FOUND ON THE SITE.
THEY MUST HAVE MISSED YOU SOMEHOW. BUT THEY'LL BE BACK ONCE THEY REALIZE I'M MISSING.
SO IF YOU HAVE ANY SENSE YOU'LL SURRENDER TO ME RIGHT NOW. I'LL SEE THAT YOU'RE PROPERLY TREATED
WELL, I APPRECIATE THE OFFER LIEUTENANT, BUT...
I'M AFRAID BY THE TIME YOUR SHIPS RETURN NEITHER OF US WILL BE HERE FOR THEM TO FIND.
BUT .. I ANSWERED YOUR QUESTIONS . I ..

DEAD..
JUST LIKE DELILAH AND THE PEOPLE...
ALL KILLED BY AN ***INTELLIGENCE REPORT*** SOME SEVENTY OR EIGHTY YEARS ***OUT*** OF ***DATE***.
THINGS LIKE THAT HAPPEN IN A ***WAR*** THAT HAS GONE ON FOR OVER ***TWO CENTURIES***.
BUT A PERSON WITH ***POWER LIKE YOURS*** MIGHT BE ABLE TO PUT AN END TO SUCH SENSELESS ***TRAGEDIES***.

PERHAPS I WILL.. SOMEDAY
BUT I'VE OTHER THINGS TO DO FIRST.


TO START OFF WITH I'VE THE ***FIRST NOVA SQUADRON*** TO DEAL WITH..

..AND THEN THERE'S ***KING NELLOR*** OF THE MONARCHY. HE'S THE ONE WHO GIVES OUT ALL THE ORDERS.

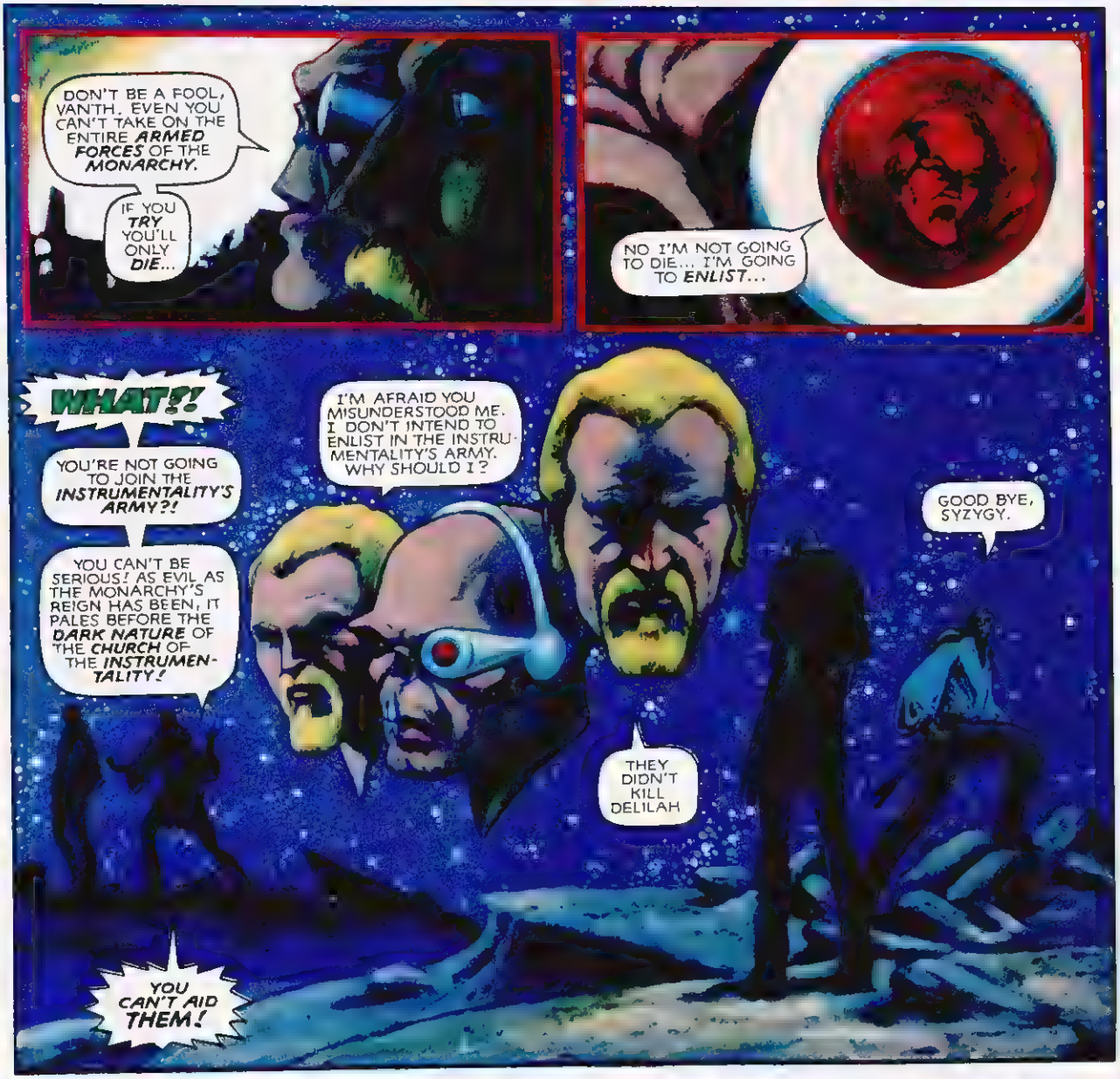
VANTH, PLEASE TELL ME I'M WRONG. YOU'RE NOT PLANNING TO DO WHAT I THINK YOU ARE, ARE YOU?
I'M PLANNING ON USING MY POWERS AGAIN
TRUE, IT'S NOT GOING TO BE QUITE AS YOU ENVISIONED IT, BUT LIKE IT OR NOT...
VANTH DREADSTAR THE STARSLAYER, THE COLD MAN, THE WIELDER OF THE SWORD LIVES ONCE MORE
ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO TALK ME INTO EARLIER? WELL, YOU SUCCEEDED.
YOU'RE PLANNING ON KILLING KING NELLOR?
YES.
DON'T DO THIS, VANTH
YOU CAN GIVE THE UNIVERSE SO MUCH. DON'T WASTE YOUR MIGHT ON THE BLIND AND USELESS PURSUIT OF VENGEANCE.
REVENGE IS AN EMPTY CUP WITH A BITTER TASTE

NO, YOU'RE WRONG, SYZYGY. FOR ME, REVENGE WILL BE SWEET AND OVERFLOWING.

AN HOUR AGO I HAD A WIFE. I HAD FRIENDS. I HAD A HOME. I HAD A LIFE. I HAD PEACE.
NOW I HAVE NOTHING EXCEPT A BURNING PAIN IN MY SOUL

ONLY THE WINE OF VENGEANCE WILL SOOTHE THIS ACHE.

I DON'T CARE IF IT'S RIGHT OR WRONG! I DON'T CARE ABOUT ANYTHING!
SOMEONE HAS STOLEN MY LIFE! STOLEN EVERYTHING I LOVE!
SOMEONE MUST PAY FOR THIS!
PAY FOR IT WITH THEIR LIVES!


DON'T BE A FOOL, VANTH. EVEN YOU CAN'T TAKE ON THE ENTIRE ARMED FORCES OF THE MONARCHY.
IF YOU TRY YOU'LL ONLY DIE...
NO I'M NOT GOING TO DIE... I'M GOING TO ENLIST...
WHAT?!
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO JOIN THE INSTRUMENTALITY'S ARMY?!
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS! AS EVIL AS THE MONARCHY'S REIGN HAS BEEN, IT PALES BEFORE THE DARK NATURE OF THE CHURCH OF THE INSTRUMENTALITY!
I'M AFRAID YOU MISUNDERSTOOD ME. I DON'T INTEND TO ENLIST IN THE INSTRUMENTALITY'S ARMY. WHY SHOULD I?
GOOD BYE, SYZYGY.
THEY DIDN'T KILL DELILAH
YOU CAN'T AID THEM!

THE MONARCHY-INSTRUMENTALITY WAR CONTINUES. THE MASSACRE AT RESEARCH CENTER DELTA 219 IS TWO YEARS IN THE PAST AND NOW ONLY A FADED MEMORY OF THE MEN OF THE FIRST NOVA SQUADRON.
THIS WORLD IS KNOWN AS JAXON'S TOMB. IT IS A SMALL MINERAL-RICH SATELLITE, OCCUPIED BY BOTH THE INSTRUMENTALITY'S 7th SACRED BATTALION...
...AND THE MONARCHY'S 2nd ROYAL DIVISION, COMMANDED BY A CERTAIN...
...CAPTAIN DREADSTAR!
YES?
SGT. MILNOR! WHAT HAPPENED?
WE HAD AN EXPLORATORY RAID SPRUNG ON US BY THE 'INSTYS' OVER ON HILL 28
WE BEAT THEM OFF BUT NOT BEFORE I CAUGHT A RADIUM LASER SHOT IN THE LEG
RADIUM LASER...? YOU'RE SURE IT WASN'T A STRAIGHT LASER? IT MIGHT
NO, IT WAS RADIUM ALL RIGHT. I CAN FEEL ITS GAMMA CHARGE ALREADY BURNING THROUGH MY SYSTEM
THEY'RE TAKING ME OVER TO MEDI-CAMP 7 SO I CAN CRAP OUT IN A NICE CLEAN BED OUT OF SIGHT OF THE TROOPS
I'M SORRY, MILNOR YOU WERE ONE OF THE BEST MARINES I'VE EVER FOUGHT BESIDE

THANKS, CAPTAIN. BUT I DIDN'T STOP THESE *RUST BUCKETS* JUST TO FISH FOR COMPLIMENTS.
THE SCUTTLEBUTT HAS IT THAT YOU'RE BEING *TRANSFERRED* OUT
IS IT TRUE?
I'M AFRAID SO...
I'M TO REPORT FOR DUTY AT THE ROYAL PALACE'S *MILITARY LIAISON OFFICE* NEXT WEEK.

SEEMS TOO MANY OF THE BATTLES I'M IN CHARGE OF HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE *VICTORIES* RATHER THAN THE NORMAL *STANDOFF*.
SO THE *ADMIRALTY* IS SHIPPING ME OUT OF HERE BEFORE WE ACTUALLY START *WINNING* THIS WAR.
YEAH, THEY SURE DON'T SEEM TO LIKE THE IDEA OF THIS WAR EVER ENDING, DO THEY?

NO, AND IT NEVER WILL END THE WAY IT'S GOING NOW...
... UNLESS *SOMEONE* DOES *SOMETHING*.

THERE AIN'T NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO, CAPTAIN. YOU'LL REALIZE AND COME TO ACCEPT THAT AFTER YOU'VE BEEN IN A WHILE LONGER.
THE ONLY THING IS MY KID'S BEEN CALLED UP INTO SERVICE

HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE ASSIGNED TO THE *2nd*. AND I WAS HOPING I COULD SHOW HIM THE ROPES.. BUT NOW.
PERHAPS THE WAR WILL BE RUN A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY BY THE TIME YOUR SON ARRIVES, SERGEANT.

I'M GOING TO BE RIGHT INSIDE THE *ROYAL PALACE* NOW. I'VE BEEN HOPING THIS WOULD HAPPEN. I'VE PLANS

PLANS...? WHAT KIND OF PLANS? YOU SOUND LIKE A MAN WHO'S UP TO NO GOOD.
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING OF DOING, CAPTAIN?
SOMETHING THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DONE OVER TWO CENTURIES AGO...
...SOMETHING I CAN'T EXPLAIN IN FRONT OF THESE MEDI ROBS.
YOU KNOW, AS A MARINE I'M SUPPOSED TO BE DUTY BOUND TO REPORT TO COMMAND ANYONE WHO'S MAKING NOISES AS SUSPICIOUS AS THE ONES I HEAR COMING FROM YOU...
BUT I WAS A FATHER BEFORE I WAS A MARINE, SO ALL I'M GOING TO SAY IS... GOOD LUCK, CAPTAIN
GOODBYE, SERGEANT
CAPTAIN! LT. HALEA REPORTING, SIR
WORD JUST CAME IN, SIR. YOUR PLANS TO RETAKE SECTION SEVEN HAVE BEEN A TOTAL SUCCESS. ENEMY FORCES ARE IN FULL RETREAT.
HOW'D OUR TROOPS FARE?
OVER ALL, WE SUFFERED VERY LIGHT CASUALTIES, SIR
EXCEPT FOR THE 1ST NOVA SQUADRON, WHO LED THE ADVANCED ASSAULT WAVE.
I'M AFRAID THEY WERE WIPED OUT TO THE LAST MAN, SIR
WILL THAT BE ALL THEN, SIR?
NO. NOT QUITE..

GALACTIC WAR IS A BIZARRE WAY OF LIFE... A GROTESQUE STUDY IN CONTRASTS. ONE DAY YOU'RE ON A FILTHY MUD-BALL OF A WORLD FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE. THEN A FEW DAYS LATER YOU FIND YOURSELF ON JEWELWORLD, POWER BASE OF THE MONARCHY.
IT IS A WORLD OF GLEAMING STAINLESS STEEL TOWERS AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES AND COMFORTS, PEOPLED WITH MEN OF POWER AND PRESTIGE. ITS CAPITOL, JEWELCITY, IS THE HOME OF THE ROYAL FAMILY.
IT IS ALSO THE NEW HOME OF VANTH DREADSTAR.
CAPTAIN DREADSTAR LIES DEAD, CRUMPLED ON AN EASY CHAIR WITHIN THE PALACE'S BACHELOR OFFICERS' QUARTERS.
THE PALACE IS PROBABLY THE MOST CAREFULLY GUARDED AND HEAVILY FORTIFIED BUILDING IN THE GALAXY. ONLY MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY WHO HAVE BUSINESS IN THE PALACE CAN GAIN ENTRANCE TO IT.
TWO YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR A MAN HE WISHES TO KILL HAVE GAINED VANTH ADMITTANCE.
BUT NOW THE DARK GREY OF THE BYFREXIAN HUNTER IS DONNED.

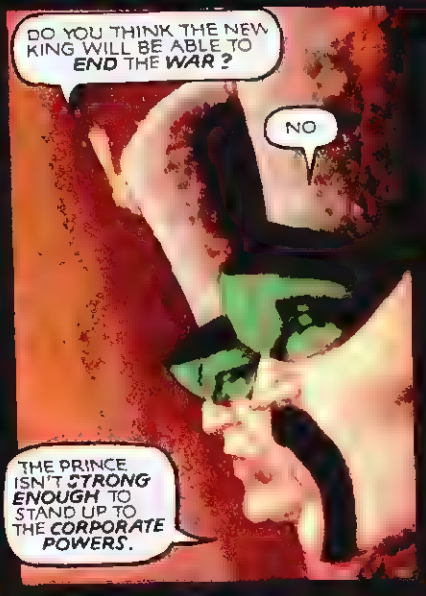
BUT TWO YEARS OF WAR MONARCHY-INSTRUMENTALITY STYLE HAVE CHANGED THE MAN IN THE DARK HOOD.
TWO YEARS OF WATCHING GOOD MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN BEING SENSELESSLY SLAUGHTERED IN A WAR NEITHER SIDE WISHES TO WIN HAS TOUCHED THE COLD-EYED WARRIOR.
TWO YEARS OF MADNESS HAVE CHANGED HIS PLANS
KING NELLOR MUST STILL DIE FOR HIS CRIMES, BUT HE MUST ALSO BE ELIMINATED BECAUSE HE'S TOO HEADSTRONG AND TREACHEROUS A LEADER FOR VANTH'S PLANS TO WORK.
SOMEONE LIKE NELLOR'S HEIR, PRINCE GREGZOR, WILL BE MUCH EASIER TO DEAL WITH.
HALT! WHO GOES THERE?
CAPT. DREADSTAR REPORTING. I'VE AN URGENT MESSAGE FOR HIS MAJESTY.
HIS MAJESTY IS NO LONGER RECEIVING THIS EVENING, CAPTAIN
WHY IS IT THAT YOU'RE OUT OF UNIFORM, SIR ?
CENTRAL FILING REPORTS YOU'VE NO CLEARANCE FOR THIS SECTION OF THE PALACE, CAPTAIN
I AM SORRY SIR, BUT WE WILL HAVE TO DELAY YOU UNTIL SECURITY CAN..
ZAACT!
SECURITY. ALERT...
ZAACT!

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE FROM HIM! HE'S TOO DANGEROUS!
BLAST HIM FROM HERE!
I'M AFRAID THAT WON'T WORK EITHER
NOT WHEN I CAN JUST ABSORB YOUR LASER ENERGIES RIGHT OUT OF THE AIR INTO MY SWORD.
ONCE BEFORE I OFFERED TO SPARE YOUR LIVES. I NOW REPEAT MY OFFER.
FIGHT AND DIE, OR YIELD AND LIVE.
KILL HIM!
FOOL!
ARE YOU GOING TO BE A FOOL ALSO?
I. uh WELL.
NO!

MEANWHILE, BEYOND A DOOR ON THE OTHER END OF THE DARKENED ANTECHAMBER ...
YOUR MAJESTY, WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE ?
I DON'T KNOW, GIRL. IT SOUNDS LIKE SOME KIND OF RAID.
BUT IT'S BECOME AWFULLY QUIET OUT THERE NOW. MAYBE MY BOYS HAVE HANDLED THE PROBLEM ALREADY.
KING NELLOR, I'VE COME FOR YOU!
BACK, GIRL! I'LL HANDLE THIS!
WHAT?!
WHO?
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM A MEMORY FROM THE PLANET CALDOR.
I AM DEATH

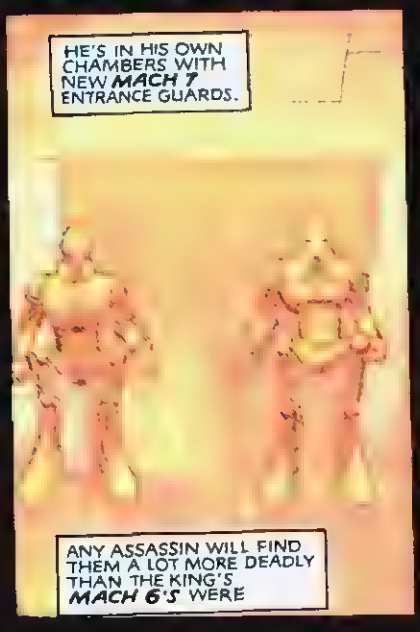
BY THE HEAVENS! I'VE NEVER SEEN ANY ONE EVER KILLED LIKE THAT. THIS WASN'T MURDER...
THIS IS INSANE SLAUGHTER... BUTCHERY...

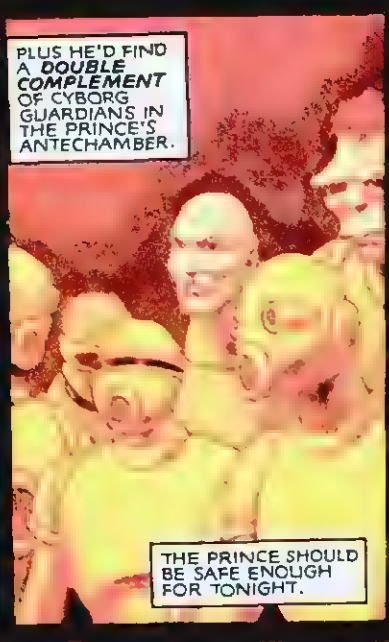
LOOKS LIKE PRINCE GREGZOR IS KING NOW.
THIS IS A HARD WAY TO INHERIT AN EMPIRE.
YEAH.


DO YOU THINK THE NEW KING WILL BE ABLE TO END THE WAR?
NO
THE PRINCE ISN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO STAND UP TO THE CORPORATE POWERS.

THEY'LL NEVER LET THIS MADNESS END. WAR MEANS TREMENDOUS PROFITS. PEACE WOULD RUIN THEM.

HELL, THEY'D ASSASSINATE THE PRINCE THEMSELVES IF THEY SUSPECTED HE WAS EVEN THINKING ABOUT TRYING TO END THE WAR
WHERE'S THE PRINCE NOW?


HE'S IN HIS OWN CHAMBERS WITH NEW MACH 7 ENTRANCE GUARDS.
ANY ASSASSIN WILL FIND THEM A LOT MORE DEADLY THAN THE KING'S MACH 6'S WERE


PLUS HE'D FIND A DOUBLE COMPLEMENT OF CYBORG GUARDIANS IN THE PRINCE'S ANTECHAMBER.
THE PRINCE SHOULD BE SAFE ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT.

STILL, I KIND OF DOUBT IF THE NEW KING WILL BE SLEEPING ALL THAT SOUNDLY TONIGHT.
DAMN THAT OLD FOOL!
WHY DID HE LET HIMSELF GET KILLED OFF LIKE THAT?
I'M NOT PREPARED TO TAKE ON HIS MANTLE OF MONARCHY.
THE JEALOUS OLD LUNATIC NEVER WANTED ME TO KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON OR HOW HIS PRECIOUS REALM WAS RUN.
GUESS HE FIGURED IF I KNEW TOO MUCH I MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO STICK A DAGGER IN HIS BACK ONE NIGHT.
I'M AFRAID THE KING NEVER REALIZED WHAT A COWARD HIS NUMBER ONE NEPHEW REALLY IS.
SO IT LOOKS LIKE THE POOR MONARCHY IS IN FOR A BIT OF ROUGH SAILING.
IT NOW FINDS ITSELF SADDLED WITH A SPINELESS KING WITH NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, WHO
...TALKS TO HIMSELF.
Uh?
WHO?!
YOUR UNCLE KNEW ME AS DEATH!
I CAN BE THE SAME FOR YOU, OR I CAN BE A FRIEND, AND PEACE FOR YOUR EMPIRE.
THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

A MOMENT AGO YOU ADMITTED YOUR INABILITY TO RULE YOUR REALM.
I'VE COME TO AID YOU IN THIS TASK.
WE'RE GOING TO START WITH PUTTING AN END TO YOUR WAR WITH THE INSTRUMENTALITY.
THEY'RE A STEP BY STEP PROGRAM FOR PUTTING AN END TO HOSTILITIES AND GETTING YOUR ECONOMY IN ORDER.
YOU WILL LOOK THROUGH THOSE PLANS ON YOUR DESK. A FRIEND OF MINE AND I DREW THEM UP.
FIRST... BY PLACING YOUR FORCES IN THE MANNER DESCRIBED HERE, YOU CAN CONSOLIDATE YOUR POSITION, SET UP IMPREGNABLE DEFENSES AND PUT AN END TO THE CONTINUAL SENSELESS SLAUGHTER THAT'S TAKING PLACE OUT THERE IN SPACE.
YOU WILL BE SURRENDERING SOME UNIMPORTANT PLANETS, BUT THOSE THAT YOU'LL RETAIN WILL BE SAFE FROM INVASION AND WILL BE ABLE TO SUPPLY THE REALM'S EVERY NEED.
SECONDLY... YOU'LL SEE THAT THE ACCOMPANYING PAPERS CONTAIN PLANS FOR A GOVERNMENT-RUN WORK AND TRAINING PROGRAM WHICH YOU WILL IMMEDIATELY INSTITUTE.
THIS PLAN, I ADMIT, WILL SEVERELY DEPLETE THE ROYAL COFFERS, BUT IT WILL ALLOW YOUR POPULACE TO SWITCH FROM A WARTIME TO A PEACETIME ECONOMY WITH NONE SUFFERING ANY DRASTIC EFFECTS LIKE STARVATION OR HEAVY UNEMPLOYMENT.
THE CORPORATE POWERS WILL KILL ME IF I TRY TO PUT YOUR PLAN INTO OPERATION!
I'LL PROTECT YOU FROM THEM.
I PLAN ON VISITING A NUMBER OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CORPORATE LEADERS OF YOUR REALM OVER THE NEXT FEW NIGHTS.
I'LL SEE TO IT THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THAT UNDER OUR PLAN THEY'LL SUFFER A COUPLE OF YEARS OF REDUCED PROFITS, BUT AFTER THAT BUSINESS WILL START BOOMING FOR THEM LIKE NEVER BEFORE.
SO THEY'LL END UP GAINING IN THE LONG RUN AND SO WILL THEIR WORKERS, FOR A CHANGE.
BUT ANY WHO OPPOSE OUR PLANS WILL DIE. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?
EXCEEDINGLY!
GOOD. I'VE ONLY ONE LAST THING...
I DO NOT OFFICIALLY EXIST, AND I WISH IT TO REMAIN SO.
AS FAR AS THE REST OF THE WORLD IS CONCERNED, YOU ARE THE KING AND ARE IN CHARGE.
I AM?

YES, YOU ARE. OF COURSE I WILL BE NEARBY IF NEEDED, KEEPING AN EYE ON THINGS AND OFFERING SUGGESTIONS EVERY SO OFTEN.
SO IS EVERYTHING UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED TO, THEN?
YES... YES, WHATEVER YOU SAY...
...BELIEVE ME... I WANT TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT... AND MAYBE WITH YOUR HELP I CAN... MAYBE ...UH?
HE'S GONE!
GONE FROM A ROOM WITH ONLY ONE ENTRANCE THAT A SMALL ARMY COULDN'T FORCE ITS WAY THROUGH.
GONE WITHOUT A SOUND.
IT'S AS IF HE WERE NEVER HERE. YET HIS PLANS AND PAPERS REMAIN TO MAKE MOCKERY OF SUCH WISHFUL THINKING.
GONE... BUT HE WILL RETURN. THE PRINCE, DEEP WITHIN HIS SOUL, KNOWS THIS IS TRUE...
...AND HE KNOWS THERE IS NOTHING HE CAN DO TO PREVENT IT.
AN ERA HAS ENDED THIS NIGHT. A NEW POWER CASTS ITS SHADOW ACROSS THE LAND AND THE CITY SLEEPS UNAWARES.
BUT NOT ALL SLUMBER WITHIN JEWELCITY. THERE ARE THOSE WHOSE LABORS ARE JUST BEGINNING AND WHO CRAVE A GOOD STIFF DRINK BEFORE THEY GO ON.
IN A SMALL SUB-LEVEL PUB...
YOU DID IT, VANTH. CONGRATULATIONS.

DON'T GIVE **ME** ALL THE CREDIT, SYZYGY. **YOU** HAD NO SMALL HAND IN DRAFTING THOSE PLANS. BESIDES...

... IT WAS YOUR SPELL OF **MOLECULAR TRANSPORT** THAT GOT ME OUT OF THE PALACE WITHOUT GETTING MY HIDE PEPPERED WITH **LASER SHOT**.

PLUS WE BOTH KNOW MY MOTIVES FOR TONIGHT WERE **LESS** THAN **HONORABLE**.

FOLKS LIKE DELILAH...

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. I NEED SOME AIR.

I WENT THERE TO **KILL** A MAN.

YOUR **MOTIVES** ARE YOUR OWN BUSINESS, MY FRIEND, YOUR **RESULTS** ARE WHAT COUNT.

THIS UNIVERSE DOESN'T NEED A **SAINT**. IT NEEDS A **SAVIOR**.

BUT OF COURSE YOU REALIZE YOU'VE ONLY TAKEN THE **FIRST STEP**.

ENDING THE WAR WAS JUST SOMETHING THAT JUST GOT TOSSED IN AT THE LAST MOMENT.

THE PEACE PROCESS HAS A LONG AND HARD ROAD AHEAD OF IT AND WILL NEED ALL THE **HELP** IT CAN GET.

YOU'VE SET YOURSELF QUITE A **TASK**, YOU KNOW.

THE **INSTRUMENTALITY** WILL NOT BE AS EASY TO GET IN LINE AS PRINCE GREGZOR WAS.

THE CHURCH IS RUN BY A COUNCIL OF **CARDINALS** AND THE **HIGH LORD PAPAL**. THESE ARE MEN OF POWER, NOT MERE MORTALS LIKE THE PRINCE.

YES I KNOW, I'VE BEEN GIVING THAT SOME THOUGHT AND I'VE A PLAN HALF FORMULATED.

YEAH, I KNOW... AND I'LL STICK WITH IT.

I SEE NOW A PERSON LIKE ME CAN'T BURY HIS HEAD IN THE SAND AND HOPE THAT WHEN I COME UP FOR AIR THINGS WILL BE BETTER.

IF I HAD REALIZED THAT YEARS AGO, A LOT OF FOLKS WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TO SUFFER AND DIE SO USELESSLY.

WELL I'VE ALSO SOME **PLANS** AND **IDEAS** THAT...

YES, I FIGURED YOU WOULD... AND I'LL LISTEN TO THEM, BUT BEFORE WE GO ANY FARTHER ...

...LET'S GET **ONE THING** STRAIGHT.

I'VE DEALT WITH A SORCERER LIKE **YOU** ONCE BEFORE AND LET THINGS GO ON THE WAY **HE** WANTED.

WE BOTH KNOW HOW THAT ENDED.

YOU WIZARDS MEAN WELL, BUT YOU GET ALL WOUND UP IN YOUR GOALS AND SCHEMES AND LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE.

WHEN YOU EXAMINE A PROBLEM YOU SEE ONLY THE **BIG PICTURE**.

YOU ONLY GO FOR THE **BIG SOLUTIONS**.

BIG SOLUTIONS TEND TO GRIND PEOPLE INTO THE GRAVE.
SO IF WE DO ANYTHING WE'RE GOING TO DO IT MY WAY.
IT WILL TAKE LONGER AND BE MORE DANGEROUS FOR US UNDER MY PLAN, AND SOME PEOPLE WILL PROBABLY STILL DIE.
I'VE SEEN MORE THAN ENOUGH DEATH LATELY.
GAMES OF REVOLUTION ALWAYS COST DEARLY.
BUT AT LEAST THE BODY COUNT WILL STAY LOW ENOUGH TO ALLOW ME AN OCCASIONAL UNDISTURBED NIGHT'S SLEEP.
THIS IS ONE BIG JOB WE'RE ABOUT TO TAKE ON.
BUT WE WON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL ALONE.
OTHERS WILL JOIN OUR STRUGGLE.
THEY WON'T BE EASY TO FIND, YOU KNOW.
ANY WHO JOIN US WILL BE LABELED AS CRIMINALS, REVOLUTIONARIES AND BLASPHEMERS.
BUT THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO FEAR NEITHER LABELS NOR DEATH.
... PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT THIS GALAXY CAN BE MADE INTO SOMETHING WORTHWHILE.
... PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN LIFE.
"MIGHT WE NOT LIVE IN A NOBLER DREAM THAN THIS?"
--JOHN RUSKIN AUTHOR, TEACHER, EARTHLING